I. Purpose

This plan provides guidelines for communicating within the campus, and from the campus to the media and the public, in the event of an emergency or crisis.

Disasters, emergencies and crises disrupt the normal activities of the campus and may require activation of the AHEC Emergency Operations Plan. This Crisis Communications Plan describes the role of Communications and Campus Relations in communicating vital information to members of the Auraria community and the public.

This plan is to be flexibly used with emergency decision-making procedures of the campus.

Elements should be tested annually in conjunction with campus-wide emergency drills. Appendices should be checked for accuracy and completeness at least annually, and as often as necessary.

II. Objectives

1. Determining whether the situation requires invoking this plan.
2. Assembling the Crisis Communications Team to recommend responses.
3. Implementing immediate actions to:
   (a) Identify key constituencies who need to be informed.
   (b) Communicate facts about the situation and minimize rumors.
   (c) Restore a sense of confidence and order.

III. Procedures

1. Assessment – The AHEC Assistant VP of Campus Relations (or their backup) will be made aware of a potential crisis or emergency by the Chief of the Auraria Police Department and/or the AHEC Executive Vice President for Administration. The AVP or their designee will then determine whether it is appropriate to invoke this plan and activate all or part of the Crisis Communications Team. If activated, the AVP will notify each of the institutional Communications Directors/Public Information Officers or their backups as soon as practical.

2. Crisis Communications Team – The Crisis Communications Team is a part of the larger Auraria Emergency Response Team (ERT), and is comprised of staff that may play a critical role in addressing the crisis, including representatives of the following, as needed:
   - AHEC Communications and Campus Relations, including the Emergency Preparedness Coordinator
   - Auraria Police Department
   - Institutional Communications Directors/Public Information Officers
In addition, the Crisis Communications Team may need to engage the support of any of the following entities:

- AHEC Facilities Services
- AHEC EVPA/Business Services/HR Staff in Admin 370 (i.e. answering phones, etc.)
- CU Denver Anschutz Medical Campus Staff (Emergency Preparedness, Police)
- Institutional Student Life Officers
- Auraria Executives Council
- EPARC Committee (Emergency Policy & Recovery Committee)
- The affected unit(s)

The above list is not meant to be exhaustive.

Time is of the essence in communicating crucial information to the campus community and the news media, and the team will be assembled as quickly as possible. Based on the timing, location, and severity of the incident(s) or event(s), this may occur either in-person or virtually. The AHEC Assistant Vice President of Campus Relations will determine when a sufficient number of the team is engaged.

The Crisis Communications Team may authorize the following:

3. **Spokesperson**: The designation of a spokesperson will be incident-dependent. Generally, this is the highest-ranking individual who has direct knowledge of the events, or the AHEC Assistant Vice President of Campus Relations. The individual selected will have the highest credibility and understanding of the events surrounding the crisis. Other qualified public information officers may fill in for these individuals if the crisis is prolonged, but they should not be the initial responders to the general public, the media, or the campus community.

In the event that the incident is related to a criminal act, the basic thresholds that the Auraria Police Department may use to determine the lead agency for public information are as follows:

- Misdemeanor Crime = Auraria Police Department lead (APD Chief or designee)
- Felony Crime = Denver Police Department/ District Attorney lead (PIO or designee)

As a criminal act relates to a particular student/faculty/staff of a single institution, the institutional PIO shall be the primary media contact, in partnership with the law enforcement spokesperson. If a criminal act relates to the campus facilities or operations, the AHEC AVP of Campus Relations shall be the contact.

Incidents that are not crime-related will follow similar guidelines. Situations that affect a single institution, such as a student death, will be represented by the respective PIO. Situations that involve the campus facilities or operations, such as a natural disaster, will be represented by the AHEC PIO.

4. **Notifying Key Constituencies**: The Crisis Communications Team will determine which groups need to be informed first. It is important to keep in mind that people will seek – and believe – other sources of information (e.g., news reports, rumors, word of mouth) in the absence of official communication. Effective communication will help quell rumors, maintain morale and ensure public safety. Appendix C2 contains a description of the communication tools, their possible applications in a crisis, and who can operate those tools.

Key constituencies include:
5. **Fact sheet:** As soon as possible after the incident, a fact sheet will be prepared to supplement communication with key constituencies and information provided to reporters by the spokespersons. It will be approved by the EVPA or designee and checked for accuracy by those with a direct knowledge of the crisis. Fact sheets released publicly or posted to the Internet must be time stamped and updated as information changes.

6. **Alerting the media:** The AHEC Assistant Vice President of Campus Relations, in consultation with the institutional PIO’s, will decide on the best way(s) of reaching the news media. In cases where a crisis is likely to be prolonged and/or especially complex, the AVP may choose to create a Joint Information Center and/or a news media briefing center to coordinate the information flow and assure that the right people are involved in collecting and disseminating information.

Given the necessary considerations for appropriate media staging locations that can accommodate vehicles such as satellite trucks, the primary location for a press conference related to a campus crisis will be St. Cajetan’s Church. The secondary location is Tivoli Student Union. Communication with the media must occur frequently, as new information is known. Information from news briefings may be captured and posted to the AHEC and/or institutional web pages, along with updated fact sheets. Effort will be made to monitor news coverage in key media and correct significant inaccuracies, either in those media themselves or in material distributed by the campus.

In general, the campus will welcome reporters and allow them as much access as public safety and good taste permit. Public information officers will facilitate access to key knowledgeable individuals and respond quickly to as many requests as possible. Communication must occur early and often but be confined to the facts. All information must be conveyed with an eye toward what will be most important to various publics.

**IV. Purpose**

This plan shall be updated and tested at least once a year. Full activation of the plan will be incorporated into any disaster/crisis exercises. Responsibility for updating the Crisis Communications Plan rests with the AHEC Campus Relations Unit.

**V. After-Action Report/Review (AAR)**

Within a week of the crisis, the Assistant VP of Campus Relations will convene the Crisis Communications Team for a review of lessons learned. This AAR may be used to provide summary information to a more comprehensive campus-wide AAR coordinated through the AHEC Emergency Preparedness Coordinator.